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First Army Division West

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Transformation brings brigade to Fort Hood

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FORT HOOD, Texas – As the demands of two wars and support to other contingencies morph the scope of training reserve component forces, First Army Division West is transforming as well.

Changing its footprint to improve its capabilities, the division nicknamed the “Training Machine in the West” is bringing the third of its seven brigades to Fort Hood.

The 479th Field Artillery Brigade, a training support brigade, cased its colors during a ceremony at Fort Sill, Okla., May 11, with plans to uncasing those colors here in early July. The 479th will transfer two of its battalions to Division West’s counterpart, Division East, but will gain four active component battalions from the 120th Infantry Brigade, another Division West TSB already at Fort Hood.

Under the new structure the 479th will maintain its capacity as a training brigade while the 120th takes on responsibility for plans and operations of units coming here for post-mobilization training. The shift in responsibility means units will coordinate with the 120th prior to arrival at the mobilization training center, but will be under the control of the 479th for training upon arrival.

“Since we just have the responsibility of training, we can do more with less,” said Maj. Peter Elstad, assistant operations and training officer for the 479th.

The brigade will be doing more with less, Elstad said, because the 479th will conduct training with five training support battalions compared to the six the 120th currently has to accomplish the same mission.

With the 120th determining what the Forces Command requirements are for reserve component units deploying through Fort Hood, the 479th will have a team of liaison officers working hand-in-hand with the 120th to establish the best ways of meeting those needs. Having both brigades at one location to make that coordination has clear advantages, Elstad said.

“I think it’s a win-win situation. Nothing beats being able to look across a table with your counterparts and complete that coordination,” he said.

That coordination previously involved video teleconferences, e-mails, phone calls, and a lot of traveling that was heavy on time and money. Aside from eliminating expenses, Elstad explained other advantages.

“There’s a level of trust, rapport and intimacy you don’t get out of a VTC as opposed to talking with a person face-to-face in the same room,”

Making the move has not come without challenges, Elstad said. The brigade’s mission of training units for deployment has not paused because of the move. The transition is happening while the brigade is still supporting ongoing operations and the build-up in Afghanistan.

“It’s a lot like the old analogy of rebuilding the engine on your truck while going down the highway at 55 mph,” Elstad said.

“The measure of success is that the units we’ve been training post-mobilization for – we haven’t had to degrade the level of training they’ve received.”



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Col. William A. Turner, left, commander of First Army Division West's 479th Field Artillery Brigade, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Giles, 479th command sergeant major, case the brigade's colors during a ceremony May 11 at Fort Sill, Okla. The 479th is in the process of restationing from Fort Sill to Fort Hood, Texas, where it will resume training Army National Guard and Reserve Soldiers for deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Bankston, 479th Field Artillery Brigade, Division West, Public Affairs)



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Spc. Tyler Muralt, a member of First Army Division West's 479th Field Artillery Brigade, paints a wall in the brigade's new office space at Division West Headquarters at Fort Hood, Texas. The 479th is in the process of restationing from Fort Sill, Okla., to Fort Hood, where it will resume training Army National Guard and Reserve Soldiers for deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations. Muralt belongs to the Oklahoma Army National Guard and is a member of the Division West Operation Warrior Trainer program. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Gail Braymen)



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Spc. John Kolbert, foreground, and Sgt. John Tetzlaff, members of First Army Division West's 479th Field Artillery Brigade, paint a wall in the brigade's new office space at Division West Headquarters at Fort Hood, Texas. The 479th is in the process of restationing from Fort Sill, Okla., to Fort Hood, where it will resume training Army National Guard and Reserve Soldiers for deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations. Kolbert and Tetzlaff belong to the Texas Army National Guard and are members of the Division West Operation Warrior Trainer program. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Gail Braymen)



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Soldiers of First Army Division West's 479th Field Artillery Brigade paint walls in the brigade's new office space at Division West Headquarters at Fort Hood, Texas. The 479th is in the process of restationing from Fort Sill, Okla., to Fort Hood, where it will resume training Army National Guard and Reserve Soldiers for deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Gail Braymen)